

Good afternoon. The Committee on International Relations' Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations is called to order.

Today's hearing is entitled: "Visa Overstays: Can We Bar the Terrorist Door?"

Since 9/11, it has become obvious that immigration generally, and visa overstays specifically, are things we no longer have the luxury to ignore.

In fact, the 9/11 Commission made the following recommendation almost two years ago, quote:

"The Department of Homeland Security, properly supported by the Congress, should complete, as quickly as possible, a biometric entry-exit screening system, including a single system for speeding qualified travelers. It should be integrated with the system that provides benefits to foreigners seeking to stay in the United States. Linking biometric passports to good data systems and decision making is a fundamental goal. No one can hide his or her debt by acquiring a credit card with a slightly different name. Yet today, a terrorist can defeat the link to electronic records by

tossing away an old passport and slightly altering the name in the new one.” End-quote. (pg. 389)

Some time later, the 9/11 Commission reported that “modest progress” had been made on this goal. My concern is that once people enter the country through legitimate visas, they are often never heard from again and we have no procedure for tracking them. The biometric procedure described above is barely in place and far from uniformly applied. And even this important issue doesn’t touch on the question of illegal immigration, a crisis that has not been tackled in years. But today’s hearing will help us determine whether or to what extent visa visitors are tracked and the routine overstay of visas is widespread.

This is no theoretical matter. As our witnesses know, at least one al-Qaeda-linked operative, convicted in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing plot, obtained amnesty through a program intended for farm workers. In my home state of California, the crime problem (and the pressure on public services) presented by non-citizens is astronomical, burdening local government and law

enforcement in a way that might be unimaginable to someone not from a border state. However, as one of our witnesses, Mike Cutler states, every state that has a port of entry is, in effect, a “border state.” This problem affects us all, which is why today’s hearing is so significant.

We have a distinguished panel of witnesses: Mark Kirkorian is one of the nation’s leading experts on immigration. He’s from The Center for Immigration Studies which bills itself as “the nation's only think tank devoted exclusively to research and policy analysis of the economic, social, demographic, fiscal, and other impacts of immigration on the United States.” Their research and work is indispensable to understand some of these issues. Michael Cutler, a former Senior Special Agent of the formerly named Immigration Naturalization Service, writes widely on these matters for the respected Counterterrorism blog ([counterterrorismblog.org](http://counterterrorismblog.org)). And, finally, Professor Margaret Stock, Department of Law at West Point, will tell us why she

believes the visa overstay issue is the last resort of the security process. I welcome them and look forward to their testimony.

I now yield to the Ranking Democratic Member, Mr DELLA-hunt, for opening comments.